

American

NEWS & VIEWS

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**President Obama, Mexican President Calderón
Discuss Immigration, Economy, Other Issues**

By Merle David Kellerhals Jr.
Staff Writer

Washington — During a state visit by Mexican President Felipe Calderón, President Obama pledged his “deep commitment to working with Congress” to pass comprehensive immigration reform.

“Comprehensive reform means accountability for everybody: government that is accountable for securing the border; businesses being held accountable when they exploit workers; people who break the law by breaching our borders being held accountable by paying taxes and a penalty and getting right with the law before they can earn their citizenship,” Obama said during a May 19 joint press conference with Calderón at the White House.

“For the sake of our shared prosperity and security, we discussed the need for immigration that is orderly and safe, and we acknowledged that both our countries have responsibilities,” Obama said.

Obama said he and Calderón discussed a new state law in Arizona that permits state and local law enforcement officers to question a person’s immigration status if they suspect the person might be in the country illegally. Obama said the law is a “misdirected expression of frustration” over the lack of effort at the national level for reforming the immigration system. The law is being evaluated by federal authorities to determine if it is unconstitutional or violates federal civil rights laws.

Obama said the American people are open to a comprehensive reform approach because it says a number of key things, one of which is that the federal government takes its border-security responsibilities seriously. But creating a more secure border must be done with the cooperation of Mexico, he said.

Calderón said the border between the United States and Mexico is not only a place where the two nations meet, but also a place for commerce, opportunity and development. He pledged that his government would work to strengthen border security.

“Both countries want to have a safe border, a safe border for our people. We agreed upon the urgency to reinforce the actions to stop the flow of drugs, weapons and cash,” Calderón said.

COMPLEX AGENDA

While Obama and Calderón have met nearly a dozen times since early 2009, this state visit is only the fourth

bilateral meeting between the two leaders. The agenda for this visit is as complex as it is intense, according to a senior National Security Council official briefing on the nature of their talks.

Immigration issues were expected to highlight their talks, but they also discussed economic development and competitiveness, clean energy cooperation, safety and security, cooperation on hemispheric and global issues from Honduras to Haiti to Iran, and the Group of 20 (G20) major economies summit in Toronto in late June.

Mexico hosts the next round of global climate change talks November 29–December 10 in Cancún. Calderón has been working to make Mexico a leader in combating climate change.

“To create clean energy jobs and industries of the future, we’re building on a partnership we launched last year with new initiatives to promote regional renewable energy markets, green buildings and smart-grid technology,” Obama said. This will help the United States and Mexico achieve commitments made at the international climate change conference in December 2009.

“As a leader in cutting greenhouse gas emissions and in helping developing countries do the same, Mexico’s leadership under President Calderón has been and will be critical,” Obama added.

Obama and Calderón also pledged to streamline business regulations and strengthen protection of intellectual property. The two leaders agreed to continue working with the G20 nations to encourage global economic growth that is balanced and sustainable.

“As the United States works to increase our exports, and the jobs that come with it, we’ll be working closely with our partners in Mexico, which is one of the largest markets for American exports,” Obama said.

Calderón said that as the economic crisis passes, it opens a window of opportunity for the United States and Canada, working with Mexico, to reposition themselves as a vigorous economic region that is competitive, prosperous and capable of generating more and better jobs — and a region that is attractive for investments, trade and tourism.

“Together, we should increase our exporting capacity in a contest of growing competitiveness among different regions of the world,” Calderón said.

Obama reaffirmed his commitment to stand with Calderón and his government as they confront illegal-drug cartels that have been responsible for substantial

violence in Mexico. The United States has increased law enforcement pressure on the U.S. side of the border against elements that engage in trafficking of illegal weapons, drugs and people, Obama said.

"We're working to stem the southbound flow of American guns and money, which is why, for the first time, we are now screening 100 percent of southbound rail cargo," Obama said. "And guided by our new National Drug Control Strategy, we're bringing new approaches to reducing the demand for drugs in our country."

U.S. and Brazil Team Up to Fight Discrimination

Digital town hall meeting brings student leaders together

By Erica Marrero
Staff Writer

Atlanta — In his book *Letters to a Young Brother*, actor and author Hill Harper writes about a friend at Harvard Law School who lost an election to be a U.S. congressman but never gave up his dream and became a U.S. senator. That friend, he writes, was Barack Obama.

The book was written in 2006, before Obama's historic election as the first black president of the United States. During the 2008 election, one issue of media focus was the role of race and identity in the election. Obama even gave a speech dedicated to that very question.

On May 21, Harper will join the Reverend Bernice King III, the daughter of famous civil rights leader Martin Luther King Jr., and two Brazilian journalists, Paulo Rogério and Juliana César, to talk about how the media influences perceptions of race in the United States and Brazil.

Harper and the other speakers are holding a digital town hall meeting that will bring together a group of U.S. and Brazilian university students and civil society leaders 4,700 miles apart.

JOINT ACTION PLAN IN ACTION

The digital town hall is part of a two-day conference at Morehouse College in Atlanta, Georgia, titled "A Call to Action." The conference is part of the U.S.-Brazil Joint Action Plan to Eliminate Racial and Ethnic Discrimination and Promote Equality. The Joint Action Plan connects U.S. and Brazilian government, civil society, and private sector representatives to explore the unique challenges facing African Americans and Afro-Brazilians in both countries.

The digital town hall marks the first time since the United States and Brazil signed the Joint Action Plan in 2008 that

the conference discussions reach beyond the confines of a meeting room to across the globe. It builds on the Joint Action Plan's statement that Brazil and the United States are both multi-ethnic, multiracial democracies whose ties of friendship are strengthened by shared experiences.

The U.S. Consulate General in Rio de Janeiro partnered with the Pedro Calmon Foundation and the Brazil-U.S. Cultural Association to host a viewing party for the digital town hall at the Public Library of the state of Bahia in Salvador. The live audience in Salvador will have the opportunity to ask questions directly of the panelists in Atlanta. The speakers will also answer questions submitted online via webchat as well as from the in-room audience in Atlanta.

Following the digital town hall, participants can continue the discussion on the Joint Action Plan Facebook page.

U.S. Mideast Envoy Begins New Round of Indirect Peace Talks

By VOA News

U.S. Middle East envoy George Mitchell has begun a second round of indirect peace talks between Israel and the Palestinians focused on possible outlines of a future Palestinian state.

Mitchell met May 19 in Ramallah with Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas for the first time since indirect talks with Israel were launched earlier this month.

Chief Palestinian negotiator Saeb Erekat said the new round of indirect talks will focus on borders and security.

Mitchell is expected to meet with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu May 20. The U.S. envoy will continue to shuttle between the two sides for up to four months to try to narrow the differences on the terms of Palestinian statehood.

Abbas has insisted he will not enter direct talks until Israel stops all building of homes for Jews in East Jerusalem and the West Bank — occupied land the Palestinians claim for a state.

Netanyahu has accepted the idea of a Palestinian state, but with conditions and without East Jerusalem.

Israel has frozen new housing starts in the West Bank since last November for a 10-month period as a peace gesture. But it has refused to stop building homes for Jews in East Jerusalem, which it claims as part of its "eternal" capital.

Some information for this report was provided by AP, AFP and Reuters.

Study Urges U.S. to Push Mideast Allies Toward Democracy

Report finds U.S. often puts security interests ahead of Mideast democracy

By Mohamed Elshinnawi
VOA News

Washington — A new study by a federally funded peace organization urges the United States to step up pressure on its Middle East allies to move their societies toward meaningful democracy. The U.S. Institute of Peace argues that democracy-building would benefit U.S. security interests while strengthening those nations' standing with their people.

The peace institute's report says that the United States has often put its security interests ahead of its desire to see democracy spread throughout the Middle East.

The report's author, Daniel Brumberg, acting director of the institute's Muslim World Initiative, says supporting democracy is actually crucial to U.S. security.

"The problem in the Middle East and in the Arab world in particular is that regimes that cooperate closely with the U.S. are also regimes that are seen increasingly by their own populace as either illegitimate or repressive or disconnected from the societies they claim to represent," says Brumberg. "We think that, in the long run, more legitimacy is good for that cooperation rather than less, and that more representation and more good governance and more democracy will give regimes the legitimacy they need to pursue a strategic relationship with the U.S."

Leaving things as they are in the Arab world, the Institute for Peace study says, will result in cosmetic changes only, allowing autocratic rulers to fend off real democratic change.

The study suggests that the Obama administration work with Middle Eastern allies to repeal laws that restrict citizen freedoms, hinder political activities or suppress freedom of expression and assembly.

Brumberg argues that continuing to ignore abuses harms U.S. interests in the region. "This process is best exemplified by the case of Yemen — a regime whose leaders have been in power for 31 years — that has alienated sectors of the society itself. And as a consequence of its own autocracy, the battle against terrorism and the efforts to confront the local affiliates of al-Qaida have been undermined by a regime that is seen

as remote and repressive," he says. "Our security needs would be greatly enhanced by a clear alternative to the kind of autocracy we have in Yemen and other parts of the Arab world."

The Institute for Peace study argues that by keeping a tight rein on their people while supporting U.S. security interests in their regions, nations such as Yemen, Egypt, Jordan and Pakistan fan anti-American sentiments.

Brumberg says this paints the United States into a corner. "These regimes then turn to the U.S. and say, 'Well, the only alternative to us is the Islamists, so you must support us.' But that kind of dynamic in which the choice is just between regimes and [their] oppositions is a consequence of policies that have to be changed. And so we need to speak up more forcefully about these politics."

Brumberg argues that U.S. support for democracy in the Middle East will advance President Obama's vision of an improved relationship between the United States and Muslim-majority states. He says the promotion of democracy should go hand in hand with efforts to end regional conflicts — in particular, between the Arab world and Israel.

But Brumberg urges the Obama administration not to allow Arab regimes to use disputes with Israel as an excuse for evading their own political reforms.

Larry Diamond co-chaired the peace institute's study. He directs the Center on Democracy, Development and the Rule of Law at Stanford University. Diamond argues that the United States must use more than vague encouragement if it wants to see real democracy in the Middle East.

"I think many of these Arab leaders are deeply, hopelessly corrupt and incapable of being moved by rational persuasive arguments. It does not mean we should not make them, it does not mean that there are not younger and more reformist elements or pragmatic elements in most of these regimes that we can engage," says Diamond. "But I think this is heavily about power and that we have tools of power that we have not utilized adequately in a more strategic way."

Diamond says he is not calling for cuts in aid or reduced security cooperation. He urges the Obama administration to promote democracy more loudly and clearly.

Johns Hopkins political economist Francis Fukuyama, who also co-chaired the study, agrees. But he points out that President Obama must walk a fine line: encouraging democratic change without threatening regime change.

"The Iraq war contaminated democracy promotion, so that when you talk about democracy promotion in the region, people think invasion," says Fukuyama. "Therefore you need a new start, where the same ideas that are valid become part of the American foreign policy but somehow delinked (from) that whole invasion and occupation, so the new administration has the opportunity to do that in a way that democracy is incorporated into U.S. Middle East policy."

The U.S. Institute of Peace study notes that the United States has little choice but to cooperate with Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Jordan and Pakistan in diplomatic, military and security matters. But it urges Washington to become far more aggressive in its support of democracy in the Middle East.

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